

Naturalization for your parks

Community is essential to us. Before drafting our 2018 Master Plan, we sent out questionnaires, distributed handouts, hosted online surveys and met with residents to determine what the community wants in its parks. With this research, we identified several opportunities for improvement. One that stood out was the opportunity to “naturalize” more park spaces.

“Naturalization” is the process of allowing some park spaces to return to their natural states. During this process, residents will notice changes in the way the land is maintained. Native species like the field daisy will be allowed to thrive, while invasive species like bush honeysuckle will be fought back. We will optimize our parks by filling them with unique types of beauty and landscape.

Would you like to help?

We want you to enjoy many types of natural areas, from your mown lawn to our forested natural areas. Parks and Recreation staff is working hard to ensure the naturalization process in our parks is efficient and effective. Designating and establishing naturalized areas will take time and patience. We thank you for sticking with us!

If you would like to assist in our effort to keep Lexington natural, volunteer!

Contact Suzanne Leibee at
(859) 288-2962 or
sleibee@lexingtonky.gov

If you would like to know more, you can visit one of Lexington’s established natural areas and speak with our Naturalists on site! Find more at lexingtonky.gov/parks.



LEXINGTON
Parks & Recreation

469 Parkway Dr. Lexington, KY 40504
www.lexingtonky.gov/bring-back-bluegrass
(859) 288-2900

BRING BACK THE BLUEGRASS

The benefits
of naturalization in
our parks



LEXINGTON
Parks & Recreation

Balanced plan

Our 2018 Master Plan encompasses the future of Lexington Parks and Recreation. The plan is based on many community research efforts. With this research, we learned that 83% of Lexington households support the idea of using land to preserve open space, natural and historic areas. Two top priorities were identified as “walking and hiking trails” and “nature parks.”

To meet these requests, we have developed a plan for parkland development. Land will be balanced to accommodate active recreation and passive recreation sites that may include naturalized areas. We will restore parkland into natural areas by reducing mowing, fostering tree canopies and maintaining native species.



Natural areas

Lexington’s natural areas exist to preserve the beauty of the Kentucky Bluegrass Region. Our natural areas contain a variety of native flora and fauna, important historical features, cultural connections, refuge for visitors seeking solitude and a range of outdoor experiences.

Natural areas aren’t just beneficial for wildlife, they’re also beneficial for people near them. These areas improve water quality, reduce runoff and lower the carbon footprint.

To maintain our natural areas, we focus efforts on improving ecosystems and habitats while protecting the geological and historic features using good land stewardship. Within our natural areas, we mow less often. This encourages the naturalization of the land. Mowing less allows plants like buffalo grass and Kentucky bluegrass to return and thrive.

The success of our management can be seen in the health of our natural areas and their popularity in the community. You may have heard of Raven Run, McConnell Springs or Hisle Farm Park.

The good, the bad and the ugly (weeds!)

The naturalization process takes time. As it occurs, the landscape will take many forms. Meadows will grow, wildflowers will flourish, butterfly gardens will form and trees will sprout. Even in the winter, native species spread their seed to prepare for the spring. Because the naturalization process takes time, we ask that you bear with us. While the results will be beautiful and beneficial, the process requires the growth of plants that some would consider “weeds.”

Native plants may be confused as weeds but there is more than meets the eye. “Weeds” are critical plants in the naturalization process. For example, foxtail and joe-pye weed are great food for the bobwhite quail and mourning dove. Milkweed is a butterfly favorite. The naturalization process requires letting beneficial weeds grow and curbing harmful ones with “pattern mowing.”

Pattern mowing is a better alternative than traditional blanket mowing for ecosystems. Mowing periodically fosters growth of desirable plants. Taller grasses will grow and offer shelter for wildlife.